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PORTRAYALS OF POST-INDEPENDENT MALAY MEN IN MALAYSIAN NARRATIVES

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ABSTRACT

This paper emerged from a personal set of observations on the evolving male gender roles, currently drawing attention in Malaysia. As such, the study adds to the budding literature on Malay men and their gender roles and that of Malaysian literature in English. This comparative study is within its initial exploration on literary portrayals of Malay men's experiences, as part of performing their gender roles, specifically from Lee Kok Liang's 'Ronggeng Ronggeng' and Che Husna Azhari's 'Pak De Samad's Cinema'. We argue that Malay men's gender roles as protective entities has not undergone a tremendous change. Since the experiences of these men are narrated by a third person, understanding these men through the use of Chilesiz's phenomenological model enables us to answer a focused phenomenon – the men's experience as saviours in order to provide a priori that matches the societal, collective impression, perception and expectation of these men's gender roles. Situated in an early post-independent Malaysian context, these men are moulded into a courageous lot. Instead of fleeing for safety, readers are implored upon with gutsy men whose sense of survivability are fuelled by untamed courage upon seeing threat (either to themselves or people of affection) while juggling with societal expectations as part of forming their gender identity. Instead of using the conventional phenomenological reading onto these men, these men are viewed to show a possession of quality judgement while performing their role as saviours.

Keywords: Consciousness, gender roles, intentionality, Malay men; Malaysia, literature

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

With the mark of its sixtieth anniversary, Malaysian literature in English is no longer a foreign entity as compared to those in Indonesia which only endorses national literature as those that

are published in the national language. Despite its pace of publication trailing slowly behind its counterparts such as Singapore and India (Quayyum, 2008), Malaysian English writers took up literature as a platform for the Empire to write back against its colonisers, apart from finding identities and discussing social and cultural aspects. One of the directions which critics interestingly have taken on is to explore further on identities regarding Malaysian men, including the Malay men who are known for their pride and strong cultural association.

There is a steady flow of newsfeed on Malay men who harbour on their wives' fortune, and these stories are available in various media platforms (e.g. Shamsudin, 2018). Some labelled them '*biawak hidup*' (living lizards – a derogatory term for useless men), others called to attention how they cause a major impact on moral development. Irrespective of comments about them, the issue concerns the shaping of gender roles among Malay men where society imposes certain expectations that necessitate these group of men to follow certain rules in order to function as a social member. Its discussions help shape the body of knowledge on gender roles, especially one that is related to Malay men. Are they performing their gender roles equivalently as expected by society, either as a breadwinner or as a protector these days? The reality is that literature, too, plays an important role in discussing the weight of the problem, drawing out its impact on family dynamics as well as morale.

Based on two short stories compiled in "Spirit of the Keris: A Selection of Malaysian Short stories and Poems" (2003), this research seeks to identify representations of early post-Independent Malay men and their gender roles, and later examines the quality of these portrayals through the use of Husserl's phenomenological concepts (Husserl, 1969). Characters like Mat from Lee's (1974) '*Ronggeng ronggeng*' and Pak de Samad from Azhari's (1993) '*Pak de Samad's Cinema*' are identifiable Malay men set apart from others featured in the compilation, which are scarcely included in a post-independent setting where life settles after the colonisation of the Empire with traces of Japanese Occupation and scarred experiences from days of the communists in Malaya. These men are from different backgrounds. Mat of Lee's '*Ronggeng ronggeng*' is a percussionist in a dancing troupe who is looking for financial stability in order to perform his Hajj (pilgrimage) while Madzir is a young lad who frequents the amusement park for a little entertainment. Pak de Samad of Azhari's, on the other hand, is a local gangster who turns a new leaf by establishing a cinema in town. These men are easily distinguishable due to their ethnic identifiers such as familiar names, Islamic rites and ritual, and cultural mores among others. Mat and Pak de Samad are the conventional and the more traditional Malay men. Both men ensure stability within their household while providing consistently. In short, they are dependable. Not only do they have to struggle for survival during an uncertain economic upheaval, they also have to maintain as a reliable and dependent source of income for those who are related to them.

Our primary argument is that portrayals of post-independent Malay men in these literary texts are gradual, due to the narrators' use of consciousness in channelling their acute observations of these men. Despite the questionable validity of these portrayals, it should be noted that readers do not require fictitious mental constructs to cast doubt in accepting the situation nor its situational dilemma. While I retain the interest to analyse the construction of gender identity, especially gender roles of Malay men, it is my greater interest to explore the validity of these selected men's experiences, specifying on those capture after independence. This paper attempts to answer a particular research question: what are the men's experience of protecting their subordinates?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Gender Studies and Gender Roles

Interestingly, gender role is a dynamic process which allows both genders to make meaning of their masculinity/femininity and functions either at micro or macro level (O'Neill, 1981). The concept morphed from sex role identity to its current definition, which dissociates physicality of an appointed sex in the process of locating and understanding gender. Instead, gender can be discovered through behavioural patterns and role expectations. Pioneering men studies (e.g. Pleck, 1976; Goldberg, 1974) identified the role of providing as predominantly owned by men; their roles as the breadwinners help to differentiate men from women and this further leads to the formation of socialization. It is here where society imposes expectations and ways of treatment between the genders, starting at home where girls and boys are assigned to forms of contributions. Bem (1993) however, pointed out that a blend between the two sexual traits is a good healthy sign which blurs the conventional sexual bipolarity, providing greater emphasis to gender difference. Obviously, there are already existing different directions regarding gender differences, where one interesting observation pointed in language learning (e.g. Pital & Mat Teh, 2018). They found out that female students are likely to do better than the male when it comes to language learning strategies.

Men studies received its highlights when Kimmel and Messner (1989) observed an absence of 'gender-specific' as a variable in examining men as a research subject. Men were previously studied as if they were without gender. This welcomed Thompson, Pleck, and Ferrera (1992) to differentiate between gender ideology and gender orientation among men – distinguishing between a masculine, feminine and androgynous perspective. Although the traditional approach assigned for specific ideals of men's roles and functions, the male gender was at one point re-evaluated due to gender-role conflict and strains. Some of the contributing factors that led to this re-evaluation are the stereotypical assumption that biologic sex automatically assigns exclusive gender role behaviour, which also leads to parents' socialization of their children/adolescent, causing strict gender roles of masculinity/femininity.

The earliest studies on men can be traced in the 1990s where types of men and their gender roles were identified, quickly making way into the mainstreams of gender studies. Later, research looked into refining gender role, function and expectations which allowed men's greater involvement either in domestic or at workplace. Male gender identity experiences a constant renegotiation (Wong, 1982). Some look at attitudes towards masculinity through standard assessments (e.g. Brannon & Juni, 1984), while other identifies men according to categories in order to theorize sex roles and performance (e.g. sex role theory). Another effort to categorise men is the identification of hegemonic masculinity, apart from other types of men i.e. complicit, marginalized and subordinate (Connell, 1995), which quickly became popular and led other sub-field assessment of men in terms of skin colour (e.g. bell hooks), race, culture and spiritual backgrounds (e.g. Bosson & Vandello, 2011). Masculinity is also studied in terms of health (Courtenay, 2000) as well as scent (Klurch, 2014). Others look at stereotypes that oppress men's liberty, including the reconceptualization of victimization (e.g. Tiger, 2000; Capraro, 1994; Javaid, 2015). Men are also observed to underperform at academic level (Kahn, Brett, & Holmes, 2011), workplace, even at home.

Men's studies which emphasize on cultural contribution in shaping the understanding about men, including issues regarding its gender roles and identity, is now challenged with a new wing of approach of looking at men, known as male's studies. It is observed that an initial shift from the traditional overview on the gender, placing manhood as "signifier of normative

humanity” turned into an outlook of gender as a social construct in the early twenty-first century men’s studies (Boyd & Justad, 2013). Instead of defending themselves against misandry that feminism aims at highlighting, the core essence in male studies is to aspire men to work together with women in what is called as gender equity where men are biologically different from women, causing different behavioural pattern at handling work and life. This formed the third movement where men are encouraged to become the Moderate Men, unlike their forefathers and their tough role expectations. Unlike Connell’s (1995) definition of subordinating men, stay-at-home fathers are no longer seen as powerless; their supportive domestic roles is considered important in maintaining the sanity of their spouse and harmony within the household. The roots of male studies can be traced from the movement for men’s rights (Boyd & Justad, 2013) where it is not an extension of men’s studies. Rather, it is an entirely new different discipline (Groth, 2010).

A growing distance between the sexes does not only interfere healthy spousal relationships but also disturbs the well-being of child development and the harmony within a marriage. Each sex is overwhelmed by its own function and role that it loses its dependency of the other, which makes sense for the coming of male studies. A quick review on literature regarding the male breadwinner indicates the emergence of male studies signals a serious consideration over the concept of masculinity and men sexuality, which is altered from the way Malay men were perceived in the past.

2.2 Malay Men, Their Gender Roles and Literary Portrayals

Studies of the Malays is a dynamic body of knowledge, yet it is an interesting observation to identify epistemological patterns within the circle of its scholars. The earliest compilation of travel accounts which included observations of Malay Sultanates are founded in the mid early modern periods, in writings by Pires and Valentyn. There were other accounts on the Malays whose observations focused on local realities, talent and aesthetics (e.g. Leyden, 1821; Raffles, 1835; Swettenham, 1907). Although Raffles is considered as the first scholar to coin the terms ‘Malay nation’ and ‘Malay race’, the reception of his observation on the native remained divided. Hussein (1966) observed brilliance in Raffles’ account of the Malays while Al-Attas (1977) sees his remarks as negative. To Raffles (1835), there is an observed pride and ego among the Malays when protecting their rights. Swettenham (1907), on the other hand, noticed the traits of laziness among the natives. There are other efforts to identify the origins of the ethnic (e.g. Ryan 1976). These are considered as pioneering studies that suggest outsiders’ assessment of the native, which is regarded as negative (Al-Attas, 1977).

Instead of accepting negative portrayals of the natives, Al-Attas (1977) for example, defends of the worthiness of the Malays and defies outsiders’ branding of this ethnic such as lazy or defiant servants. Home-grown researchers later develop keen interest over a range of areas within the coming years, understanding its culture and literature (e.g. Jaaffar, Hussain, & Ahmad, 1992). It is not till the last three decades where the study of Malayness rooted among its local intellects. One possible explanation for this late bloom of interest in the field is due to the invasion of thought system, brought in by the British colonial conquest; it was a “cultural invasion” – one that paralysed the natives from understanding themselves (Amri Baharuddin, 2001, p. 357), thus robbing them of the ability or bravery to define themselves. The Malays grew complacent since they were serving the greater Master and drew further from understanding themselves, thus positing the significance of this paper.

The Malay studies are as equally difficult as other ethnic studies, like the Kadazans and the Ibans. One of its contributing factors is its religion-association ethnic-identifier, that Malayness

is associated with Islam (e.g. Amri Baharuddin, 2001; Che Don, 2007). While there are studies done to help understand the modern Malays and their 'kampung' lifestyles (e.g. Burnell, 2002; Thompson, 2004), another direction goes into rationalising the past. Ismail (2016) for example, traces elements of defiance situated during the colonisation period, existing between the Malay servant and his English superior where the latter claims of the native's purported laziness.

Reviewing literature on the Malay values is equally important. Rashid (2005) identified the Malay values as founded by three aspects – man with his God (*Hablumminnallah*), man with man (*Hablumminnas*) and man with nature (*Al-ihsan ila al-khaliq*), besides its inclusion of cultural mores. Some interesting cultural practices that are affiliated with the Malay values are the act of face-giving, face-saving and protecting self-dignity, which are highly-embedded with the understanding of managing the self as well respecting others as Allah's vicegerent.

It is also important to review continuous and developing discussions on gender roles within the Malaysian context, which has taken precedent in different fields like medicine (e.g. Ujang, Alias, & Siraj, 2017), sports, working environments (e.g. Abdul Rahim, 2008) to social environments (Kanny, 2011). While some looked into the relevance of understanding gender roles (e.g. Ujang et al., 2017), others observed the impact of misappropriating the concept (e.g. Abdul Rahim, 2008). Kanny (2011) interestingly found that there are inclinations of sexual harassment due to gender role perceptions. While the range of the literature is diverse and varied, some view such discussion as taking a dip in risky areas, only seeing its impact on a liberal Malaysia, especially after efforts of drafting a bill to provide gender equality is seen (e.g. "Govt Formulating Gender Equality", 2018).

It should also be pointed out that analyses on Malay men and their literary portrayals are frequently abandoned. Since Malaysian literature is divided into two – the Malay and English literature – it is important to highlight that few studies have been done in examining the Malay men from the English division. A notable study is a book chapter that looks into issues of religion based on a selection of three short stories in English (e.g. Che Don, 2007). The closest examination of Malay men and their form of masculinity is addressed by Omar (2006) based on a Malay literature where she approaches the novel as a postcolonial feminist reader, identifying hegemonic men's intention of taking women as their pleasure outlet. What remains interesting is researchers' interest to analyse author's choice of discussing Malay identities while keeping religion and sexuality uncompromised, thus opting for irony as a way to discuss all three aspects (i.e. Hock, 2009). This paper fills the gap in knowledge of discussing Malay men as represented in Malaysian literature in English and examining the quality of narrating that helps shape realness of characterisation, through the narrators' consciousness. Literature, too, are acceptable sources of knowledge in the effort of naming the subjects 'men' when there are limited discussion held in understanding this gender.

2.3 Husserl's (1969) Phenomenology

Phenomenology is an old philosophical branch which deals with experience, perception and perceptual experience. Many have discussed about it (e.g. Aristotle, Kant), some called it as a science of consciousness, yet, it is Husserl who innovated a systematic of understanding phenomenology. The discipline has roots from Ancient Greek and is later picked up by Western metaphysics that distinguished between being and appearance. It is through consciousness that an understanding of being is enabled.

Being a transcendentalist understanding where the incorporation of within and beyond a narrator's lens, Husserl's (1969) phenomenology aims at seeking truth within the narratives of experiencing and experienced being through a systematic process. This is the making of his

crucial concept of ‘lived experience’. Husserl explains that every experience consists of *noesis* (act of experience) and *noema* (object of action), which makes up what he calls as consciousness. While *noesis* is the conscious subject of doing where one experiences perceiving, feeling, thinking, remembering or judging, *noema* is the passive objects where they are perceived, felt, thought of, remembered as, and judged of (Cilesiz, 2011). Another way of looking at consciousness is through two entities – “explicit cognitive states and acts” and:

myriad acts and states of consciousness such as sensory awareness, perception, memory, imagination, feeling, emotion, mood, free will, time-consciousness, judgement, reasoning, symbolic thought, self-consciousness awareness, as well as subconscious drives and desires.

(Moran, 2013, pp. 37-38).

These long list of experiences can also be classified into two types of phenomena – mental and physical – where an experience can either be formed within the mind while perceived externally like colours and shapes. Cilesiz (2011) improves on this, calling it as the ideal-material duality (see Fig. 2). Husserl explains how phenomenology “seeks to identify and catalogue the objectifying structures that allow consciousness to come to knowledge of ‘what is’” or being (Moran, 2005, p. 4), where it is fluid and ongoing process of describing an object, which is achieved through intentionality. Each description is *eidetic* (or essence) in the effort of objectifying the subject, that it becomes transcendental; a priori in order to experience the world. In short, in phenomenological view, a subject knows what to construct simply because he has the priori, instead of constructing what he knows.

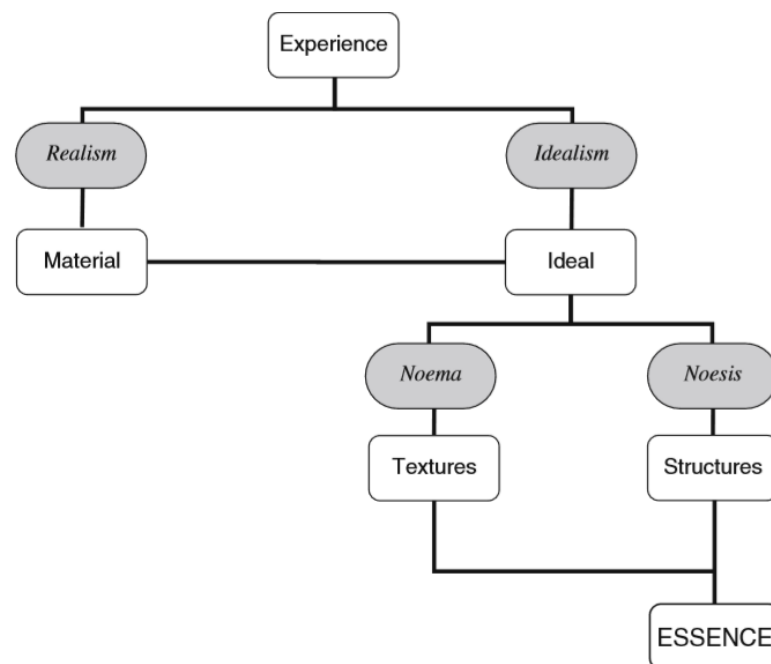


Figure 1: Cilesiz's (2011) The phenomenological concept of experience

Unlike the metaphysics, phenomenology goes beyond and embraces the suspension of judgement in order to form consciousness. This suspension is what Husserl termed as *epoche* where one does not need to decide realness or what is beyond his own experiences, simply because human experience is temporal and finite (Moran, 2005). Unlike New Historicism which inculcates the strength of *energia* mentioned in a literary text, the use of phenomenology allows readers to understand a text without referring to the real existence of the world beyond their consciousness. Their suspension of presuppositions, inferences and judgement about the object allows appreciating the affective aspect of the literary work. Husserl encourages

phenomenological readers to look at things in the right way, thus employing the motto *Zu den Sachen selbst* (Back to the things themselves) in order to appreciate how things appear and must appear.

In the attempt to understand the subject, it is also important to understand a particular term coined by Husserl –structure of experience. It is the participant/narrator's conscious deliberation to give attention to and select "items of information from the perceptual field for further cognitive processing at the personal level" (Campbell as cited in Poellner, 2007, p. 20). The structure of an experience lies within its intentionality where the experience is targeted at understanding the object of the experience. Husserl specifies on the necessity of intention at administering experience, qualifying it as acts of consciousness or what he called as *erlebnis* (Smith & McIntyre, 1944). A component of an intentional act of consciousness is the observer's reflective process, "excluding empirical facts about the object and its de facto relation to the subject", giving the value of an experiential element of the event (Smith & McIntyre, 1944, p. 3). In order to gain experience, such effort must thus be intentional, which makes it one of the principles in phenomenology. Since such experience is intentional, such experience often uncovers the reality of the object studied from a perspective. There are different types of acts which reveal types of consciousness: perceiving, judging, imagining, hoping, etcetera. An act is made up of an ego's (conscious subject's) intending (*vermeinen*) or being directed (*gerichtet*) to, or being related (*bezogen*) to (see Fig. 2).

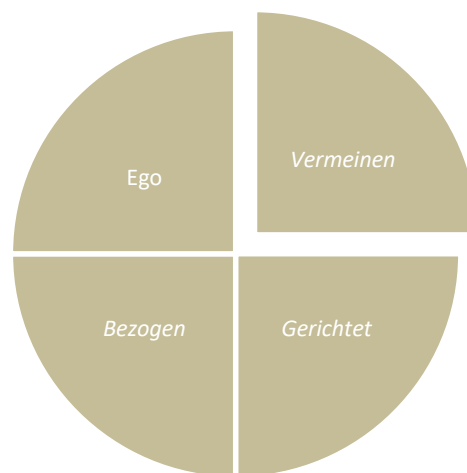


Figure 2: Husserl's (1969) Composition of an Act

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Since the short stories are narrated from a third person point of view, it provides a wealth of experiences for the attempt of identifying the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). This paper constructs understanding using Cilesiz's phenomenological model, which originally consists of five steps (see Table 1).

Upon identifying statements that are related to the phenomena, Cilesiz (2011) proposes that the first step is to conduct horizontalization. In this stage, statements that are related to the phenomena are selected after reading the short stories in different sets of reading in order to capture "a fresh look" (p. 499). Statements are carefully selected, with emphasis on their relevance to the phenomena.

In the second stage, overlapping statements that have more than one meaning/phenomena are screened. It is also in this stage where the quality in narrating is examined in order to validate the reality of experience collected on the selected men. It is inevitable that routes of individual, subjective, personal consciousness – where conscious episodes take place – have to be traced as well (Heraclitean flux or ‘stream of consciousness’). To avoid a split between subject-object, a subject-object correlation is employed in order to understand these Malay men. Instead of only focusing on the men, the narrators are also observed in order to provide a richer, more comprehensive description of the experience. It is here where the data are reduced phenomenologically, with any forms of redundancy, overlapping or vagueness in expressing experience taken out.

Table 1: Cilesiz’s (2011) phenomenological model

Steps	
1	Horizontalizing data
2	Identifying single-meaning statements
3	Creating individual textual descriptions (IDT)

In the final step, individual textual descriptions (ITDs) which are made up of narratives that represent the narrator’s description of experience on the phenomenon are created. These also consist the texture/appearance of a manifestation of the essence (*eidetic*). It also includes the researcher’s notes, which are inserted in brackets to the narratives.

4.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Horizontalizing the protective Malay men

Horizontalizing between narratives on Mat and Madzir shows identifiable lines that establish Lee’s structure of experience. On one hand, reading ‘Ronggeng ronggeng’ gives away an impression of clear-minded men and their sense of responsibilities. From the beginning of the short story, Mat for example, shows control over his dancing troupe by observing the flow of his audience, taking care of his dancers and making sure that they are kept safe. Similarly, Madzir also watches over Che Siti’s welfare, particularly since she is the apple of his heart where he spends “so much money dancing with her so many nights” (Lee, 1974, p. 169). When the white soldier decides to be aggressive with Che Siti and grope her, he is among those that climb up the stage to rescue her.

On the other hand, ‘Ronggeng ronggeng’, if it is read with sinister in mind, provides a cynical perception of ill-intended men. Mat and Madzir’s attentiveness towards Che Siti are simply manipulative in manner. Mat, for example, trains her for years that upon misfortune, he takes the easy way out to gain quick profits. Like Mat, Madzir too, spends his hard-earned cash to coax her into believing his devotion that he pounces upon an available opportunity. However, having the understanding that Mat has long taken Che Siti under his care, it is most likely for Lee to associate him with the good values of the Malays, making it the narrator’s structure of experience.

Horizontalizing Azhari’s Pak de Samad provides a redefinition of the role of a protector. Unlike Mat and Madzir, Pak de Samad takes up such role professionally for “he could be hired for a fee” (Azhari, 1993, p. 17). It is no longer a role of responsibilities; since his service is accounted for, he charges for each task, unless if “it was a matter of honour” (Azhari, 1993, p. 17). To him, the role of protecting others extends beyond filial ties and responsibilities; it covers those that deem his service. Pak de Samad is a mafia in the Malay culture where he is

affiliated with a Kelantanese dialectic word “gedeber”, which means the “fearless, strong and usually very tempestuous too” (Azhari, 1993, p. 17).

Another way of reading his passion for the job could lead to associating it with the extent of his devouring brutality and seeing the effect of his craftsmanship, as hinted by Azhari “For we all know that the transgression of the Deen was the Pak de’s way of life!” (Azhari, 1993, p. 19). However, any god-fearing Muslim abstains himself from performing small *syirik* (idoltry), which includes committing adultery and killing, and even causing harm to others. The latter is indirectly a pronouncement against Allah’s commandment, as prohibited by the Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. There are parts in the narrative where Pak de Samad is described to be mindful of the local ‘alim’ (religious men) where he chooses to be close to them and regards their words as sacrilegious (Azhari, 1993, pp. 18-19).

The choice to perceive these men either in the good light or its opposite requires an understanding about the Malay values, which also concerns its religious obligations. While it is easier to retrospect these men as belonging to the darker side of the Malay world, early postmodernism remains neutral in its approach. Instead of opting for either a descriptive or didactic narrative, most writings aim for mediocracy – a middle path between both.

4.2 Tracing types of consciousness and creating Individual Textual Descriptions (ITDs)

Lee’s consistent use of a third-person’s narration provides an omniscient perspective, running into Mat’s mind and emotions throughout the short story. However, there are times when the narrator sheds perspectives from Mat’s point of view that adds to the understanding men’s experiences. Like a camera panning away from the scope, readers receive an experience of going into the object of narration; into Mat’s mind and looking into the past. This is a crucial element in Husserlian phenomenology where the division between subject/object becomes blurred and readers are bound to ask, is this Lee’s perception or is it Mat’s? While there are questions on the portrayals of experience either on the level of the narrator as the subject as well as the author’s, it is interesting to trace them into details.

Despite the lack of expression, Mat’s voice remains crucial, especially in providing a context in the form of a flashback where he first salvaged Che Siti from a promiscuous situation. This personal consciousness provides an understanding about her past; one that involves her abduction and sexual abuse. It situates locale that explains the quasi-dynamics between the two and how the two become family where he builds a career out of her talent as a *ronggeng* girl in his own established dancing troupe. Instead of branding her as a useless and indecent girl, Mat employed *epoche* and set aside his judgement against her moral reputation. His faith in her decency continues for many years, which is suggested through her long years of loyalty (of course, some might contend that her stay is due to her sense of loyalty; as due to feeling owed for his salvation).

Again, the narrator intentionally hands over narratology to Che Siti in order to provide another personal consciousness. The climax of the narrative sees her entangled between two giants – the fight between the Malay men and the white men that causes a twist to Mat’s hopeful dream of performing Hajj. The percept becomes clearer as Che Siti sees herself as defenceless against the men. It is also at the same point where Mat’s dreams shatters when the evening dance parlour turns into a boxing ring. As she seeks refuge at the corner and watches the men hustle their way in disguise of honouring their women’s good reputation, the flying chairs and shoes are symbols of Mat’s withering hopes. Yet, instead of succumbing to the situation, he rushes to reconsider his options. It is either him or the other as he decides to let go of his responsibilities towards Che Siti. Interestingly, the author’s aesthetic gaze chose to stop short

upon delivering Mat's intention to sell her off to the neighbouring Chinese dance show that is reported to be giving good money but with a condition of shame where the "girls there took off their clothes." (Lee, 1974, p. 172). When reflecting upon the more lucrative option as a means to overcome poverty, Che Siti repeatedly expresses her dismay; it is a "shameless" act (Lee, 1974, p. 172).

This is where the author uses the technique suspense of judgement where instead of narrating the end, readers are invited to speculate the end. It is also in this aesthetic approach where the author invites the readers to (re)consider the essence (*eidetic*) of the phenomenon – has the role of protecting others, become secondary upon seeing a threat to the dream? Has Mat's dreams become greater than the act of salvaging a girl's pride? Since the author is a Chinese man, is the concept of *Iman* (Faith) and Mat's act of hoping for Allah's forgiveness and society's acceptance ridiculed when he does nothing to ensure the welfare of his subordinates?

In other instances, the role as a protector tends to overlap with other roles; one in particular is the role as a breadwinner. Madzir, for example, is put under the microscope when Che Siti wonders his preference to dance with her every night, asking "How could he save and bring up a family?" (Lee, 1974, p. 170). His fancy for her contradicts his role as a family provider, albeit his status as a single man where his responsibilities include taking care of his family. Instead of protecting a means that ensures the stability of his household, Madzir is questioned for his reckless spending. His decision to waste his wage on a questionable purpose is seen unfitting for his role as a protector. Unlike Madzir, Mat is never questioned in terms of his responsibilities as a breadwinner. He functions only as the man who takes care of the troupe. At this point, the point of view shifts from the narrator to Che Siti, providing the readers a more personal consciousness regarding the phenomenon.

In the many archetypes of Malay men, Azhari (1993) provides a perspective of a considerable marginalised man; one who is the least favoured in discussion, simply because Pak de Samad represents the dark side of the Malay culture. Such a man is often associated with the underground world where an assignment normally requires them to axe a particular target. Pak de Samad's sense of providing is no lesser dignified (as compared to Mat and Madzir). He had an early start, taking up his father's profession as a *gedeber* man. Awang Kecik, who was also called as Pak Cu Bulu – however, held a more prestigious role; he is the bodyguard of a Penggawa (District man).

Like Lee (1974), Azhari (1993) narrates the short story from a third person's point of view where there are occasional mentions of the persona "I" in between reflections concerning the subject that readers tend to mistake Pak de Samad as the subject or the object of the narrative.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The validity within the portrayals of Malay men is traced using phenomenological approach as represented in the selected short stories. While the practice of horizontalizing these men opens up to dark interpretations of their deeds, it can be concluded that triumph of Malay values highlight goodness and respect for others. Like other types of literature, Malaysian literature works well within altruism as the last frontier to improve humanity that are seemingly wilting in the face of scientific and technological advancements. The pursuance of technology holds back on humanity's need to inculcate good thoughts for others, as things are taken literally. Yet, it is literature that provides a bastion to salvage good aspects in humanity, including the nurturing of good values.

Reading these men reveals a particular observation about the phenomenon of Malay men as protectors – that there is a sense of pleasure in showing courage. These men are daring upon seeing a need for their chivalry. However, there are times when the two phenomena collide and become redundant in its delivery that it gives away the impression that neither can be without the other. Both phenomena are co-existent in its make-up that any Malay men should consider obliging both in the prospect of claiming themselves as good men.

To protect others is indirectly to take care of them, which includes providing a roof and food on the table. These expected gender roles are clearly instilled within the men in the selected short stories that its discussion is too familiar and instilled among the Malay men that others outside the ethnicity, too, regard its significance. Despite the absence of filial ties, Malay men fulfil expected roles to watch over those they are assigned to – as a boss, as a fellow Malay, as a fellow villager.

Albeit Lee is a non-Malay writer, he is much accustomed with the Malay cultural mores and values that are engraved with Islamic aspects where goodness is the making of a good Muslim. His refusal to continue with the ending, giving only ambiguity to the short story only makes one wonder – is there such a Malay man who is bold enough to consider such option? Lee's aesthetic choice leaves the decision to the readers, instead of deliberating the finale to the plot. Here is a display of wit where despite the fact that Malaysian literature in English are quickly gaining reception among its readers, short story writers give face to the norms and practices of the Malays, painting positive images of the ethnic, thus creating a structure of their experience.

The Malay norms and culture are heavily engrained with Islamic teachings that if there is one misconduct, it is done not because of the religiosity nor the norms of the people but simply because life is a test of patience – again, another aspect that is heavily pregnant with Islamic values.

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